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Current Support Brief

THE CPSU LETTER OF 30 MARCH
TO THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS:
A REAFFIRMATION OF SOVIET STRATEGY
IN UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES



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THE CPSU LETTER OF 30 MARCH
TO THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS:
A REAFFIRMATION OF SOVIET STRATEGY
IN UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) took another step toward bilateral discussions with the Chinese by proposing in its letter of 30 March to Peiping that high-level talks begin in Moscow about 15 May. The USSR took the occasion to reaffirm its basic positions on doctrinal issues, particularly with reference to its strategy in underdeveloped countries. Because such questions undoubtedly will be a major issue in any forthcoming meeting and because Moscow shows little inclination to modify its basic approach to the "national liberation" movement, it may be useful to review briefly the Soviet position as expressed in the letter of 30 March.

1. Some Underlying Assumptions

The underlying strategic concept which motivates current Soviet policies in underdeveloped areas has its doctrinal roots deep in a Communist perspective that envisages the growth of the world revolution as essentially a centripetal historical process in which a growing federation of industrialized Soviet republics draws "liberated" colonies into their orbit largely by force of "economic attraction." Tactically, Soviet theoreticians visualize the transformation of underdeveloped countries to socialism as encompassing a two-stage process: in the first stage, socialist countries support bourgeois national liberation movements in which indigenous Communists play a subordinate role; in the second stage, socialist countries actively encourage a progressive polarization of class forces within the country in which a proletarian, peasant-based Communist alliance would assume dominant control and further the "social" (Communist) revolution.

Predicated on the assumption that with Western morale and will to resist vitiated by this growing "encirclement" of Soviet-dominated nations,

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current Communist doctrine concludes that "the remaining bourgeois complexes will in all probability surrender with all their organizations intact." Whether, in fact, this nonviolent -- and on the whole optimistic -- solution would be realized depends primarily on capitalism's own efforts to avert its impending collapse. It was previously conceded, however, that the West would seek to resist this transformation through resort to force and hence the "series of frightful collisions" that both Lenin and Stalin envisaged for the period of transition to world Communism:

The working class and its vanguard, the Marxist-Leninist parties, are striving to carry out socialist revolution by peaceful means, without civil war. Implementation of this possibility would correspond to the interests of the working class and of all people, the nationwide interests of the country. Besides this, the choice of the road to the development of revolution does not depend only on the working class. If the exploiting classes resort to violence toward the people, the working class will be obliged to use nonpeaceful means to gain power.*

What is significant in more contemporary Soviet attitudes toward East-West relations in general, and the national liberation movement in particular, is the present Soviet leadership's assessment of the existing "correlation" (that is, balance) of world forces -- an appraisal that takes account of the nuclear stalemate and the growing economic power of the socialist countries and that effectively denies to the West its traditional alternative of reliance on military force to resolve the East-West struggle:

* All quotations are from the text of the CPSU letter of 30 March.

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The antipopular and predatory nature of imperialism has not altered, but with the establishment of the world socialist system, with the growth of its economic and military might, the possibilities of imperialism's influencing the course of the historic process are being markedly curtailed Fear of the answering blow and the terror of retribution restrain them from unleashing world war. The socialist comity has become so strong that imperialism can no longer thrust its conditions and dictate its will on the peoples as before.

Hence the terms of Khrushchev's coexistence may be "imposed" on the West, thus providing a growing possibility for the USSR to select both the forms of struggle and the field of battle.

2. Neutralism and the National Bourgeoisie

Whereas Stalin refused to recognize in principle or in fact the existence of a "third force," an "uncommitted country," or a "neutral" in the East-West conflict, Khrushchev not only accepts the fact that between the two poles of imperialism and anti-imperialism there is a "neutralist zone" but stoutly endorses the policy of nonalignment as a practical and advantageous one for the uncommitted nations. Significantly the current Soviet interpretation of neutralism is markedly different in emphasis from that commonly accepted by the West or, indeed, by Stalin. The idea of a "third force" playing an essentially passive and peripheral role in world affairs is thoroughly rejected by the present Soviet leadership. A policy of neutralism is in no way synonymous with a renunciation of active participation in world politics or, more importantly, in the struggle against imperialism. On the contrary, neutralism and nonalignment not only offer an opportunity for independent political development but create favorable conditions for economic development and large-scale material support from the Bloc:

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The Communist Party of the Soviet Union regards fraternal alliance with the peoples who have cast away the colonial yoke and the peoples in semi-colonies as one of the cornerstones of its international policy. Our Party regards it as its international duty to help the peoples advancing along the path of gaining and strengthening national independence, all peoples striving for the complete destruction of the colonial system. The Soviet Union has been and is supporting ... all-round moral, economic, military, and political support to the national liberation movement.

Moreover, the nonalignment policies of many newly emergent nations are regarded by the USSR as a peculiar form of split in the world capitalist system -- a denial to imperialism of its hitherto trusted rear or reserve. The extension of Bloc economic ties with newly emergent nations is designed effectively to preempt traditional Western economic domination and to deny to capitalism unrestricted access to the markets and sources of cheap labor and strategic raw materials on which a substantial part of its strength is presumed to rest:

The peoples struggling for their own national liberation and those who have already won political independence have ceased or are ceasing to serve as a reserve of imperialism Now, when political independence has been gained, the struggle of the young sovereign states against imperialism and for final national regeneration and economic independence is coming to the fore. The underdeveloped countries' achievement of complete independence would mean a new, serious weakening of imperialism, since in that case the entire system of the present plundering and unequal international distribution of labor would unavoidably be destroyed. The basis of economic exploitation of the world's rural areas by capitalist monopolies would be undermined. The development of the independent national economy of the underdeveloped countries, using as a basis the effective aid of the socialist system, will deal a new, heavy blow to imperialism.

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Reminiscent of the Communist tactics toward national liberation movements before Chiang Kai-shek's "betrayal" in 1927 and again during the "popular front" movements in the mid-thirties, Khrushchev has reinvested bourgeois-nationalist leaders with an "historically useful role" in the struggle for national liberation, thus establishing the basis for "lengthy cooperation" between them and the countries of socialism. For what seems of major significance in current Soviet attitudes toward non-Communist governments of underdeveloped countries is not the ideological commitments and ultimate ambitions of one or another of the contemporary national bourgeois leaders but the more immediate goals toward which they strive and the "objective" consequences (such as Nasser's anti-Western bent) of their actions. Regardless of whether they themselves realize the full meaning of the revolution in which they have taken part, their avowed policies of "nonalignment," when reflected in a coincidence of attitudes with the Bloc on many international issues, enable them to play, in the eyes of Soviet strategic planners, an essential role in the anti-imperialist struggle and make them unwitting allies in the development of the world socialist revolution.

Thus differences in outlook and social systems need not impede the development of friendly state-to-state relations with such governments, and even overt anti-Communism may be tolerated, within the context of Khrushchev's more "creative" approach to the national liberation movement:

In the struggle to gain and consolidate independence, the all-round cohesion of all the forces of the nation which are ready to struggle against imperialism is essential. The right wing of the national bourgeoisie, striving to consolidate its dominating position after the achievement of independence, can establish reactionary political regimes and persecute communists and other democrats for some time. Such regimes are not, however, longlasting, if for no other reason than that they hinder progress and ... achievement of economic independence This is why, despite active support by the imperialists, these regimes will be swept away by the struggle of the popular masses.

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Within this Communist perspective, Soviet Bloc economic assistance to prospective national democracies is viewed as helping to build up an economic system that ultimately will become the legacy of a Communist regime. Khrushchev may well insist that his policy is one of aid to peoples rather than to governments: Nassers may come and go, he once remarked, but the Aswan Dam as a symbol of Communist aid would stand forever.

3. "National Democracy"

In what appeared to be a tactical effort to forestall "doctrinarians and Leftists," who seek to "jump over certain historical stages," a vaguely worded and ill-defined concept of the "national democratic state" was inserted at Soviet suggestion in the Declaration of the Moscow Conference of 81 Communist Parties in December 1960. Designed, apparently, to formalize the transitional stage of development in countries where "capitalism has lived out its day, but the conditions for socialism have not yet matured," the "national democratic" government is to consist of a ruling coalition embracing elements of the working class, the peasantry, the democratic intelligentsia, and the anti-imperialist strata of the national bourgeoisie. "National democracy" does not pose as its immediate goal the liquidation of all exploiting classes or the construction of Soviet-style socialism but rather the completion of the "bourgeois-democratic, national-liberation, anti-imperialist, and feudal revolution."

The calculated vagueness with which the 81-Party Declaration dealt with the concept of national democracy, and Peiping's subsequent silence on the thesis suggests that Moscow's more gradualist formula for the period of transition between national liberation and socialist revolution in underdeveloped countries has not met with Chinese acceptance.

The Soviet letter of 30 March refrains from employing the term "national democracy" in deference to apparent Chinese sensitivities on the subject but reaffirms its belief in the formulation as a particularly relevant definition of the sort of environment in a non-Communist state that will lead it into a Communist course of development:

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The emancipated peoples are coming face to face with the problem of consolidating political independence, liquidating economic and cultural backwardness, and destroying all forms of dependence on imperialism. The vital tasks of national regeneration in the countries which have cast off the colonial yoke are successfully realized only on the condition of a resolute struggle being waged against imperialism and the remnants of feudalism, through unification into a single national front of all patriotic forces of the nation: the working class, the peasantry, the national bourgeoisie, and the democratic intelligentsia.

To date, no "national democratic" states have as yet been recognized as such, although Soviet spokesmen have consistently pointed to Indonesia, Guinea, Ghana, and Mali as examples of "prospective national democracies." Cuba, originally hailed by Bloc spokesmen as a "national democracy," apparently has been unwilling to accept the formula, perhaps in anticipation of a higher state of historical development than the "national democratic state" formula implies. Significantly the recently announced Soviet slogans for May Day 1963 acknowledge Cuba as in the process of "building socialism."

4. Prospects

The tenor of the Soviet note seems to provide for little or no compromise in the Soviet position. While ostensibly welcoming "an exchange of opinions" at the projected meeting, it nevertheless asserts, "The entire course of world development in recent years has fully confirmed the correctness of the line of the Communist movement," and adds, "We are deeply convinced that there are no grounds for a reexamination of this line."

Furthermore, that the Kremlin continues to be reluctant to sanction any immediate overt moves for power by Communist Parties in underdeveloped countries is made patently clear in its warning that "precise analysis of the concrete situation and correct assessment of the correlation of forces are among the most important conditions of the revolution":

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One must not hold back the impulse of revolutionary masses in the struggle for the victory of socialist revolution when objective and subjective conditions have become ripe for this; this would be like death. But revolution must not be pushed artificially if conditions are not ripe. A premature rising, the experience of the class revolutionary struggle shows, is doomed to failure.

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